

2019 End of Year Thoughts from Core Member Joe Allen

A few days ago I found myself sitting a bit awkwardly in the front row of an auditorium with Rich Price and a few Friends, listening to Rob Bell share on the essence of joy. I've struggled entering the season of Advent this year; it's felt clumsy, clunky, and oddly ill-timed. Many of us have been there — driving up and down the state, visiting family, managing work emails by phone, navigating desert snowstorms and ruffled political feathers, barking at the bickering kids, stressing over surprise bills, trying to carve out time from bare bones. It's hard enough to be present, let alone seek joy in this season. That night Rob Bell reminded us that cynicism is easy but joy — joy is deep and low and wide. "Joy can handle the whole spectrum of human experience... Joy reframes the pain of life, it doesn't mask or hide or repress it..." And my favorite, "Joy exposes the bendiness of time," meaning that in joy we get to experience the "eternal now," not bare bones or flying by, but those holy, sacred, bottomless moments in time. We cannot experience joy without being truly present to our current realities; but in that presence we have the chance to let joy reframe and refill our experience of the life God has given us.

I've met few individuals who focus on being present with those around them as intentionally as Rich and Jayne Price. Whether Rich is with men in prison, on the field, at the soup kitchen, or in the community; he holds the gift of acknowledging where a person is while allowing the weight of their circumstances to ground them in the present moment. Between classes of fledgling spiritual directors, groups of women seeking rest and connection to God, or folks in the community needing wisdom and support; Jayne is remarkably committed to opening and holding space for people to exhale and become present in their lives.

This work of recognizing where a person is in their moment — meeting them there, engaging with them, choosing to be present and walk alongside — this is the work Jesus modeled for us all; this is the work that enables us to see, to understand, and to experience joy. This is the work the Prices choose to do. Rich and Jayne do this consistently without judgement, providing opportunities for others to see the vast presence of God alongside of us, opportunities to understand our circumstances and self from God's perspective, through the framework of love that brings deep joy. It is hard, it is consuming, it is the work of bringing the Kingdom into the here and now, it is the work of God's heart.

That night Rob Bell reminded us, "We don't have to go to the mountaintop to experience joy; there's enough material in the valley." This year I've watched Rich and Jayne go into the valley with so many people. Continuing to work and support the frustrated coaches and players of a losing football team, grieving with a wounded friend mourning the death of his marriage, raising funds for a single-parent neighbor in need to have light when the power goes out, providing guidance and counsel and space for countless individuals seeking to deepen their relationships with God and others. They are present with those around them, they support and meet them where they are; in doing so, they enable them to experience God's holy invitation to joy.

As this year draws to a close, I'm so thankful for your partnership with Jayne and Rich in this ministry. Your support has enabled them to be responsive, present, and intentional with so many in Santa Cruz County and the greater Bay Area. The work they do and the impact Christ has through them is so much bigger than I can effectively communicate. Rich and Jayne depend on God for their financial support; and while they've never been 100% funded, you won't ever hear them complain or mention it. Their commitment to this work doesn't wane, as so many of us can testify. If you're able, I ask you to join us in financially supporting Rich and Jayne Price; continuing to free them up to their vital ministry as they invite so many to be present to the presence of God, sharing the true gift of deep joy in this coming year.

Thank you again for your partnership and support.

Warmly,

Joe Allen

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